

Washington, D.C. Congressman Sanford Bishop announced today that legislation which will provide 180 days of transitional health care to service members who separate honorably from active duty and agree to serve in the National Guard or Selected Reserve will soon become law. Bishop authored the legislative language and offered it as an amendment to the House version of the 2009 Defense Authorization bill, which passed last spring. The final version of the bill was recently approved by both chambers of Congress, and will soon go to President Bush, who has indicated he will sign the bill into law.

“Without the right incentives to retain trained and experienced Guard and Reserves forces, our nation will face greater challenges keeping the threat of terrorism at bay,” Congressman Bishop said. “It is in the interest of national security that we retain these highly skilled men and women, and incentives such as transitional health care will help accomplish that objective by providing the brave men and women of our military with an extra measure of comfort as they move back to civilian life.”

Currently, when an active duty service member retires or is involuntarily separated from military service, he or she is afforded 180 days of transitional health care at no cost. Service members, however, who have served honorably and simply leave active duty at the end of their contractual agreement are not afforded transitional health care. They may be entitled to the Continued Health Care Benefit Program (CHCBP) up to 18 months although it may be too cost-prohibitive for a soldier and his/her family just leaving the service. Current fees are more than \$900 for an individual (per quarter) and approximately \$2,000 for families (per quarter).

By providing 180 days of health care at no cost, the Bishop proposal will allow these separating service members some measure of relief knowing that their families will have health care coverage as they make the transition to the civilian workforce or continue their education. The benefits also will be long-term savings in training costs by encouraging the retaining of skilled service members in the Selected Reserve, especially those soldiers with proven leadership and maturity. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the legislation has the potential to retain 13,000 trained and ready services members in our National Guard and Selected Reserve every year.

The amendment is the text of a bipartisan bill authored by Bishop along with U.S. Representatives Steve Buyer (R-IN), Gene Taylor (D-MS), and Jeff Miller (R-FL). In the Senate, the amendment was championed by Senators Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) and Mark Pryor (D-AR).

The transitional health care measure had been supported by the National Guard Army/Air, the Army Reserve, the Navy Reserve, the Marine Corps Reserve, the Air Force Reserve, and the Coast Guard Reserve. In addition, it had been supported by the Guard and Reserve professional organizations as well as our nation's leading veterans' organizations including the National Guard Association of the United States, the Association of the United States Army, the Reserve Officers Association, the Military Officers Association of America, the National Association for Uniformed Services, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the America Legion.

Overall, the FY 2009 Department of Defense Authorization authorizes \$531.4 billion in budget

authority for the Department of Defense and the national security programs of the Department of Energy. The bill also authorizes \$68.6 billion to support ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan during FY 2009.